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IN THE HOSPITAL

BY

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD ✓

NEW YORK AND LONDON
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

The Knickerbocker Press

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Dedication

TO MY FATHER

As a flower that blooms for the many
Doth yield, all unasked, its perfume,
And though planted by rudest of hands,
Doth sweeten all earth where it stands,
Albeit it grow on a tomb,

So a name that I love above any,
I lay on my book, with the prayer
Its dear presence all wrong may efface,
And its nobleness, goodness, and grace
May enshadow my words unaware.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

I.

GRIMED with misery, want, and sin,
From a drunken brawl they brought him in,

While tearless-eyed around his bed,
They whispered coldly : He is dead,

And looked askance as they went past,
And said : Best so. He has sinned his last.

But the Doctor came and declared : Not so.
A fragment of life yet lies aglow.

And day and night, beside the bed,
He bent his skilful, earnest head ;

By night, by day, with toil, with pain,
Coaxed back the worthless life again ;

Coaxed back the life so nearly told,
And the man returned to his ways of old,—

Returned unchanged to his old, sad ways,
And sinned and sinned to the end of his days.

And the Doctor wrote in his private book :
Sin, Sorrow, Wrong, where'er I look.

I have saved a hideous life. And why ?
That a man curse God again, and die.

II.

The mother smiled through her wretchedness,
For the new-born babe lay motionless.

And the nurses looked at her ringless hand.
Best dead, they said. We understand.

But the Doctor came and declared : Not so.
A fragment of life yet lies aglow.

And wrestling close and long with Death,
He brought again the faltering breath,

And gave the poor unwelcome life
Back to the mother who was not wife.

And she took it with loathing, and bore off in
shame

The babe for whom Earth had no place when it
came.

And the Doctor wrote in his private book :
Sin, Sorrow, Wrong, where'er I look.

I have saved a needless life. And why ?
That a babe risk Heaven ere it die.

III.

With pitying hands and gentle feet,
They bore in a child struck down on the street,

Mangled and bruised in every limb,
With brow snow-cold and blue eyes dim.

And they kissed the silk hair on his golden head,
And sobbed : 'Thank God, the sweet child is dead .

But the Doctor came and declared : Not so.
A fragment of life yet lies aglow.

And day and night, beside the bed,
He bent his skilful, earnest head,

With patience, care, and tireless pain,
Won back the broken life again ;

Won it back from the brink of Death's calm river,
To struggle, and sicken, and suffer forever ;

Won it back from the merciful shores of the dead,
To lie through slow years on a terrible bed.

And the Doctor wrote in his private book :
Sin, Sorrow, Wrong, where'er I look.

I have saved a sorrowful life. And why ?
That a child taste of Hell ere men let him die.

And the Doctor closed his book, and said :
Three live by me who best were dead.

BEYOND THE HOSPITAL.

THE Doctor's work was done. He lay
Upon his death-bed, old and gray,

With the look on his face as of one who has wept,
And has labored and watched while his fellows
have slept.

And he folded his hands on his weary breast,
And murmured : Come, Death. I am ready for
rest.

God judge of me lightly. I did what I could,
And yet have wrought evil in striving for good.

And swiftly, lo, all space was riven
To where the Angels stood in Heaven.

And he heard one say : A wise man dies.
Is it time I went down and closed his eyes ?

Not yet, they said. 'T is in his book :
Sin, Sorrow, Wrong, where'er I look.

Is he ready for Heaven who needs to learn first,
God's hand brings a blessing e'en out of life's
worst ?

Not yet, said they. This wise man said :
Three live by me who best were dead.

Is he ready for death, knowing not what life
meant,
That no being lives but to some good intent ?

And the Angels stood beside his bed.
Unlearn Earth's falsehoods, friend, they said.

And the Doctor uplifted his questioning gaze,
And saw through the world and its innermost ways,

Where grovelled a mortal, close wrapped in his sin,
Degraded without and degraded within.

God forgive ! groaned the Doctor. I am the cause
Yon creature yet liveth to transgress Thy laws.

Speak soft, said the Angels. How mayest *thou* tell
What moment of sinning condemns him to Hell ?

Or how knowest thou but some late day of grace
May find, e'en for him, in high Heaven a place ?

Leave God to adjudge him. Thou seest in part ;
Thou look'st at the life ; God looks at the heart.

Oh, pity him, help him ! but dare not to say
It were better to shorten his life by a day ;

For as red flags of danger warn off from the road,
So yon erring soul hath led many to God.

The Doctor smiled softly : I understand.
God holds, e'en for sinners, some work in His hand.

And he turned his wondering eyes away
To where a cradled infant lay,

While the mother hung o'er it with love and with
 shame,
For she gave it a life, but could give it no name.

God forgive ! cried the Doctor. The babe, but
 for me,
Had been spared all knowledge of Earth's infamy.

Speak soft, said the Angels. That babe is the link
To draw her soul back from destruction's brink.

There is nobler work given those puny hands,
Than falls to the lot of the Angel bands.

Oh, pity it, shield it ! but dare not to say
It were better to shorten its life by a day :

For sweeter is Rest, won through danger and toil ;
And purer is Purity treasured through soil.

The Doctor smiled softly : The longer our strife,
The nobler is winning the heavenly life.

And he turned his tear-dim eyes away
To where a child complaining lay,

Struggling and spent with incurable pain,
While Death stood aloof, and science was vain.

God forgive ! moaned the Doctor. The child, but
for me,
Had never awakened to life's cruelty.

Speak soft, said the Angels. How mayest thou
know
What beautiful growth comes to Earth of his woe ?

Oh, pity him, love him ! but dare not to say
It were better to shorten his life by a day :

For like flowers that spring but on sunless knolls,
Some graces bloom only in tortured souls,

And a hundred hearts, all for the sake of that one,
Are learning the beauty of duties done ;

Are learning unselfishness, thoughtfulness, care,
By the side of that pain which they may not share.

And the sufferer—Heaven deserteth such not ;
God's arm is around him ; envy his lot.

Amen ! said the Doctor. God stoops to the weak.
'T is they who are strongest have farthest to seek.

Oh, blessèd all lives, since for each God hath use,
Despite of sin, sorrow, and wrong, and abuse !

I thank Thee, I thank Thee, O God, that those
three
Whose lives I deplored are yet living by me.

Then low spoke the Angels : Now tell it in Heaven
A glad soul the more to our fair Realm is given.

And the sunlight fell soft as God's kiss on his head,
And men stooped o'er him weeping, and said : He
is dead.

But his lips wore a smile of supremest content
And of infinite calm. He knew now what Life
meant.

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.



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